

LEADERS ARE CHANGING OPINIONS ABOUT DEMONS

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Negatively, the devil is defeated. Positively, the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in every one of us who is a believer. Paul writes, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). As a result we can affirm with a great deal of faith that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Put all this together and you can make a good case for concluding that it is not possible for Satan or his demons to afflict a Christian

But few Christians, if any, carry this to an extreme. Most at least recognize that temptation and sin come not only from the world, not only from the flesh, but also from the devil. They take seriously Peter's admonition that we must be sober and vigilant because "your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Peter, of course, is writing to and warning Christians, telling them to resist the devil or else. Even Jesus teaches us to pray: "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13).

While Satan has been defeated, he is not totally destroyed, nor will he be until the fulfillment of Revelation 20:10 when he and his friends are cast into the lake of fire. I think he can be likened to a hunted lion which has received a load of buckshot in the intestines. He may be mortally wounded, but the time between being shot and dying is the time the beast is most dangerous.

In my research, I have noticed several things. For one, almost all those who themselves are actively involved in a ministry of ex-

orcism or deliverance affirm that Christians can be demonized. Those who deny it, by and large, have had little or no direct contact with the demonic.

For another, I have discovered that several Christian leaders have changed their opinion on this matter over the years. But the changes I have found have all been in the same direction: from once denying that demons can harm Christians to now affirming that they can and do. As of yet, I have not known of those who have changed from believing that demons harm Christians to not believing it any more.

Southern Baptist evangelist James Robison says there was a time when he did not believe that Christians needed deliverance from demonic oppression. Looking back, he now says, "I never dreamed that I needed to be delivered, but for years I was tormented by the devil." He confesses that, while engaged in a successful evangelistic ministry, he was tormented by covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, unforgiveness and many other sins to an extraordinary degree. Then, through the ministry of a discerning friend, Milton Green, he was delivered from what he perceived to be a demonic claw, and from that moment he was a free man.

For example, Charles Swindoll, author of a number of Christian best sellers and pastor of First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, California, has changed his opinion. In a booklet entitled *Demonism*, he raises the question, "Can a Christian be demonized?" His answer: "For a number of years, I questioned this, but I am now convinced it can occur... Wicked forces are not discriminating with regard to which body

they may inhabit." Swindoll asserts that through the years he has worked with troubled, anguished Christians. And "on a few occasions I have assisted in the painful process of relieving them of demons."

One of my good friends through the years has been Edward Murphy, missionary to Latin America, professor at Biola University and now vice-president of Overseas Crusades. Murphy says, "It used to be thought—and I made this assumption just like everyone else—that the moment the Holy Spirit entered a new Christian's life, the evil spirits, if there were any there, were automatically expelled." His missionary experience, however, forced him to change his mind.

"I have found," says Murphy, "that people can come to Christ in a genuine salvation experience and still have problems in the demonic realm." Murphy now has a regular ministry of delivering individuals, Christians included, from evil spirits.

We can take authority over the demonic in Jesus' name. We have the Holy Spirit in us who is more than sufficient to ward off the roaring lion, whether it has been hit by buckshot or not. Most Christians I know are not demonized because their shield of faith quenches the fiery darts of the wicked one. But where Satan has broken through to harass, I want to be among those who recognize it and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, put a stop to it.

The Bible does not say, "Ignore Satan and he will flee from you." It tells us that he flees when we resist him. Recognizing who he is and what he does is the first step in intelligent resistance.